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Androgyny, masculinities and the re-gendered aesthetics of the new wave: Duran Duran and the second British Invasion

The early 1980s presented a reaction to the steadfast musical genres of disco and rock, along with responses to the ways that men were represented during the late 1970s and early 1980s. The genre that responded to the images of masculinity of the time was called 'new wave' music. This wave often made reference to hands outside the United Kingdom, in what is generally understood to be the second British Invasion. These new images of the masculine allowed young men to challenge gender norms, and the new male of the time became a visible signifier: a vision of maleness into a post-glam-rock pastiche of movement, contradictions and irony. By using the band Duran Duran as its subject of analysis, this article examines the ways by which the masculine re-signified itself, as well as ways that one can read alternative images of maleness away from the confines of a more mainstream heteronormativity. In doing so, it takes a close look at music history, images of masculinity, the new wave movement and Duran Duran, with the aim of articulating how the youth culture of the time and the second British Invasion provided necessary relief from the sometimes confining realities of maleness and masculinity found in more mainstream cultural production of the early 1980s.

The early 1980s presented a very curious intermeshing of disco and rock, causing two clashing genres to come together in some unique ways, in what falls under the umbrella of 'new wave' music. This wave often made reference to bands outside the United Kingdom and the second British Invasion, one similar to the first if not within such a transitional decade as the 1960s. Nonetheless, the second British Invasion did release sounds and images never heard before as part of a popular culture movement that back then was coined 'New Romanticism', a short-lived subgenre of new wave.

Whereas the first British Invasion questioned marriage, sex, racism and rock music as an American genre and provided an incredible voice of resistance and freedom for youth culture, the second British Invasion, roughly twenty years later, during a very different time, started to question music, genre, gender and style. Artists that made their sounds heard over the Atlantic brought something to North America not yet seen: a gender-bent androgyny, a new kind of post-disco sexuality, a soon to be 1980s new-mod. Eyeliner (or 'guy-liner' as it is often called by male rock stars who don it), tapered trousers, busy hair in a variety of colours and textures and often lovely voices and faces questioned gender norms within the context of the post-punk. Rebellious in appearance but fashion-forward and so very hip, with electronic sounds, these intriguing bands presented new images of masculinity, new images for teen life. Their new images of the masculine allowed young men to question gender, challenge normalcy from aesthetics to self-representation to sexual orientation as a visible signifier, and reconstruct their own vision of maleness into a post-glam-rock pastiche of movement, contradictions and irony. The result was the 'new man' of the early 1980s, a far cry from his hairy-chested and mustached disco-other: a new dandy, a new kind of hero for teenage boys to emulate. Further, the first wave of British new wave bands embodied a desire to respond to the

immediate past, as the various bands revealed a new agency that accompanied representation/signification, gender, desire and the aesthetics that epitomized the early 1980s.

A concise understanding of music, from The Beatles to new wave, is important. The Beatles stemmed from an already established form of American popular teen music, early rock, with Elvis being the best and most significant historical figure. The market was made up of teen girls swooning for 'The King of Rock 'n' Roll' and teen boys copying his image, seeking something fresh and for them incredible to emulate (Frith 2001). The Beatles continued this tradition, as myriad video clips on the Internet featuring both Elvis and The Beatles attest to this teen phenomenon. This gendered split--swooning girls and copying boys--is what defines youth culture from Elvis to the present, and this gendered reality is a central part of new wave, Duran Duran and the images of male singers and artists that accompanied the records. By the mid-1960s, a shift in music had occurred, a division within the larger British Invasion whereby some bands embodied a pop version of rock 'n' roll (as seen with The Beatles) and other bands (like The Rolling Stones) embodied a darker style of rock (Frith 2001). This became complicated even more by the late 1960s as glam rock also became a part of the music scene, crystallized by the late, great David Bowie. By 1970, rock had three forms: pop rock, dark rock and glam rock. Glam, as the 1970s reveals, remained far more edgy. Folk became yet another genre, not really rock but still a part of youth and hippie culture. The changes in musical genres became very distinct during the 1970s: in my reading, glam rock became a part of urban culture, an integral part of a burgeoning queer subculture (another area that would merit a project unto itself), as rock and disco rivalled one another for radio air time and music sales, and folk had another market, certainly popular as well.

As glam quietly held its market, by 1978, artists such as Gary Numan and bands like Blondie began releasing sounds that became labelled as 'new wave'. Not quite glam, definitely not disco and by no means classic rock, this wave introduced the sounds and images that influenced the gender-bending artists of the second British Invasion, an invasion that had its own agenda: the shifting of musical sounds, the debunking of the rock/disco split and a series of images of young men not formerly presented in popular culture (although such images were certainly cued by David Bowie's various incarnations and personas). By the very late 1970s new wave artists began to do even more, and from Gary Numan, Japan, Spandau Ballet and The Human League came Duran Duran and the new images of the male subject that accompanied their record albums from the early 1980s.

Duran Duran is the primary focus of this article as it was the most successful of the bands that appeared during this time, presenting a new masculinity that transgressed sexuality and related boundaries and inspiring trends among both high school and college crowds. Other bands, such as Culture Club and its contemporaries including Dead or Alive and Visage, did not achieve the same level of success as Duran Duran, save Culture Club to a certain degree; however, Boy George's gender insubordination is hardly a vision of the masculine, and the kinds of images and sales associated with Culture Club have already been investigated by M. King Adkins (2015:11-14). Through Duran Duran, this article looks at the ways by which the masculine re-signified itself and presented rather fluid new images of maleness, freed from the confines of the heteronormative realities of mainstream culture. The new male image of the early 1980s challenged the mainstream but also stayed within the boundaries of heterosexual desire, providing a new outlet and vision for an alternative mode of understanding masculinity in relation to both gay and straight young men of the time.

AXIS/THEORIES

Post-punk subculture and music produced myriad images that teen and young-adult culture readily absorbed. As punk began to die, new wave started, and even more sounds and images were released and consumed by teens and young adults. As non-normative, the male new wave artists anticipated through their own representations, a queering of male culture and related ways of understanding the aesthetics of masculinity in the wake of the death of disco. Such queering of the male subject challenged the heterosexual matrix--either the rock god or the disco playboy--and teen culture aptly absorbed the images of this new dandy and appropriated him within youth and college culture. As a teenager in college and/or sneaking into new wave bars, I saw what other young men, gay or straight, saw: boys carrying a rather dandified image of the then-'new man'. The fluidity of these men was rather dynamic: Duran Duran and their ilk presented the masculine in new ways. Boy George of Culture Club and Annie Lennox of the Eurythmics really challenged gender norms by preforming gender, as George often looked like a woman and Lennox chose a masculine persona or even a performance of masculinity and femininity (the music videos for 'Who's that girl' (1983) and 'I need a man' (1987) are excellent examples, the former even using two versions of Lennox herself as well as the rather fey Marilyn). Young men such as the members of Wham! and Kajagoogoo's Limahl presented rather gay images of male youth during this time. (George, Lennox and the other artists identified above require at least one subsequent research project to be explored with the integrity necessary.)

The decline of disco, the death of punk and the advent of new wave bands coming out of the United Kingdom released myriad new images of the male subject, both face and body, and thus presented new ways to consider maleness and a new kind of post-disco masculinity. Sound changed dramatically, as did the articulation of the male rock star 'skinny sound': an anti-guitar sound involving the synthesizer became 'the primary voice' with a major emphasis on 'artificial sound' (Adkins 2015: 9). This artificiality, this postmodernization of the artist/subject, became entwined in the post-punk male singer and the ways he chose to represent himself (Adkins 2015: 9). The Human League and Japan did this first (or so it seems); yet, this study of Duran Duran in particular reveals that maleness was transgressive, moving between and even around constructed essentialist divisions of what straight or gay might be.

In its early phases, as a new genre New Romanticism exhibited a not-yet-fully-formed 'conjectured jouissance' (Butler 1993: 209), a detailed play with fashion, image and perceived sexuality. M. King Adkins further reads this new kind of music and new kind of artist as part of the postmodern realities of new wave and focuses on the notion of disconnection, especially when looking at new wave music videos (2015: 11). There is a movement from reality to photograph, and then a bit later on to video image; and masculinity articulated through the male artist, reveals a disconnect from previous notions of masculinity and the male subject. During this period, music became entrenched in images of the new male music artist as a highly stylized insubordinate male. The post-punk enunciated images that reclaimed spaces of identity, of movement, of sound and performance that questioned arcane models of considering gender. New Romanticism echoed punk in its defiance, but where punk defied politics, New Romanticism challenged gender. Butler might understand this gender play, this version of the performative as the 'killing ideals of gender [...] resignified' (Butler 1993: 125). The members of Duran Duran particularly went against 'hyperbolic heterosexual gender norms' (Butler 1993: 125), displacing the heterosexual matrix, temporarily extinguishing what

maleness looked like within traditional mainstream/popular culture. However, the members of Duran Duran were called 'faggots' to their faces, as a particularly American resistance to them was based on their level of 'being styled'.

Such homophobic panic is rather ironic, as none of the members of Duran Duran proved to be gay (not that this reality should even matter). Nonetheless, they thwarted the norms of masculine representation through their new image in conjunction with what Adkins refers to as 'the dangerous tool [of] photography' (2015: 14). The band's early photo shoots--the postmodernization of the male subject made evident--reveal Duran Duran's desire to have the new male self-noticed: record sales may have been paramount but the photo shoots themselves and the originality they embody challenge the gender norms of the time (see, e.g., any of the photographs associated with the UK and US releases of Duran Duran's eponymous first album in 1981). This type of male artist is no disco sex commodity; he is not the virile, old-school 1970s rock star; he is not the possibly effete/maybe gay male subject that Japan and Spandau Ballet placed forward with their recordrelated images. Instead, he is a mix of all three, containing hints of masculinity from a traditional perspective (e.g. body language, confidence), sexiness in a new form (e.g. atypical fashions) and, despite eye-catching makeup and hair, queerness that has become fluid and difficult to pin down. The members of Duran Duran were known to be playboys of sorts, and the ways by which they queered their image allowed them much flexibility to promote, sell and articulate new images of the male subject.

What might initially have been regarded as revolutionary about the New Romantic male was later seen as a threat, even emasculating. The 'anti-essentialist identity politics' that the members of Duran Duran articulated through their imagery was not a performance of queerness per se, but rather a performance of a masculinity not yet seen in the absence of the association with homosexuality, and not pejorative in any way as it blurred the understanding of gay/straight semiotics (Butler 1993: 208). As history revealed, this dandyism embodied a heterosexual desire, a desire to enunciate maleness from one's own position, to debunk approaches to understanding masculine desire and to read a new male text as othered within its own arena of desire--desire to be, desire to be heard and desire to be young and famous. Glamour played a big role here, a post-Bowie glam that allowed image to fuel a new reality for the male subject; male subjects became 'vessels through which to convey ideas' (Adkins 2015: 67). The supposedly 'empty image' that early new wave embodied was 'self-reflexive' and offered 'a kind of imagistic feedback loop' (Adkins 2015: 68). In my reading of the band, the new male that the members of Duran Duran represented became articulated in their music videos post 'Planet Earth' (1981). As early as 'Careless memories' (1981), images of maleness that would continue to be conveyed throughout the videos that accompanied the band's second album, *Rio* (1982)--of 'playboys explorers and secret agents' (Adkins 2015: 67)--were articulated, within the construction of the band's understanding of the contemporary male self. *Rio* and its famous music videos would only hit MTV in 1982 and 1983; a part of this video extravaganza was the use of 'Girls on film' (1981) from the band's first album as the source of a rather racy music video that accompanied the *Rio* videos. The *Rio* music videos were primarily shot in exotic Sri Lanka and Antigua, though 'Girls on film' was not. As well, during their early period Duran Duran played with time--'Girls on film' was released with the *Rio* music videos, and the music video for 'Is there something I should know', a Beatles-esque video, was released in spring 1983, post *Rio* and before *Seven and the Ragged Tiger* (1983), even though the song itself was

included on the US re-issue of the band's first album. This confirms the most popular period for Duran Duran, just prior to mega-stardom, when they were not New Romantic anymore but also not yet mainstream and/or popular with both the hip teen crowd and college students.

CULTURAL REALITIES AND THE PRODUCTION OF NEW SOUNDS AND IMAGES IN THE EARLY 1980s

The late 1970s in the United Kingdom was a problematic time at best. The Americanism/consumerism of disco was not the same in Europe as it was in North America; especially in the United Kingdom, glam rock from David Bowie to Brian Eno and Roxy Music enjoyed a strong cult following. By 1976, a sound that countered the pop presence of disco and the stylized vision and smooth sounds of glam rock spoke to a population in a very political manner. Yet the tone of punk music, rather redundantly and a bit too often, was angry, so angry that possibly the actual rage it articulated consumed itself as well. From impoverished lifestyles to hard drugs to aggressive concerts, punk promoted a way of life that not all high school kids could relate to. The political reality of punk, moreover, remained a discourse of subculture that needed to change. New Romanticism initiated this change.

By no means is this intended to imply that punk was reductively one thing or another, violent to no end. However, the lifestyle--including spitting fans at concerts, rather rough crowds and a politicized agenda (Goldstein 1984: 36)--does position punk as (at the very least) subversive, although subversive can also be read as transgressive here. As Dick Hebdige explains, by 1977

People and the News of the World ran items on punk babies, punk brothers and punk-ted weddings. All these articles served to minimize the Otherness so stridently proclaimed in punk style, and defined the subculture in precisely those terms which it sought most vehemently to resist and deny.

(Hebdige 1981: 98)

Punk thereby remains a paradox and, despite such articles and such a theoretical position on subculture, my guess is that, by 1978, the working-class and middle-class youth of the United Kingdom wanted another option: they did not want their leisure space accentuated by the same kind of realities as their socio-economic lives. New Romanticism, as a post-punk genre, offered such liberation, providing a 'discursive construction of the object itself that could cancel out the old and bring in the new (Butler 1993: 210). This new object/object became the new male body of the New Romantic.

Such liberation took place in the leisure space of the teen and young adult (sub-) cultures of the era. The visuals and music produced by artists during this time period revealed 'another way of relating use and exchange value in the circulation of cultural goods' (Frith 1997: 171). From such an exchange of sound, images and appropriation by youth culture comes the kind of conflict that concerns this project. Simon Frith further explains, 'Leisure involves a tension between choice and constraint: it is an aspect of the general relationship between production and consumption' (1997: 171). Duran Duran broke leisure as a controlled reality, producing something musically and visually that could transgress space and image, pushing sound and gender into another realm of consideration. The members of Duran Duran thus sparked a vision of 'anti-essentialist identity politics' (Butler 1993: 208), to use Butlerian language, sending gender norms into a tailspin of

representations that would not be seen the same way again (although the millennial's electroclash movement did reinvent some of these images and their gender-bending). While other bands of the era will be cross-referenced, this article is particularly concerned with Duran Duran's images of masculinities, a visual aesthetic that remains positively subordinate/transgressively powerful as it questioned norms and presented an almost postmodern James Bond--a groomed, artistic, pensive and creative male subject.

Punk was the slowly dying dominant music genre of the time, and at the start of the band's career Duran Duran played alongside Hazel O'Connor in Birmingham at predominantly punk venues. The band's members were forced to live in a camper during their early years, when they were appreciated yet spat on and had to deal with the antithesis of the crowds they would soon draw in (Goldstein 1984: 36). Meticulously put together from head to toe and oozing style, their sound came not from guitars only but rather from a strong synthesizer-based ensemble. Musically and aesthetically they did not have a place in the world, but they were in the process of creating such a space by 1980. The aggression of punk faded to silence as the second British Invasion began. The new sounds were sweet, both electronic and melodic, as band names such as ABC, A Flock of Seagulls, Japan and Spandau Ballet were being spoken by hip teens. These names, like the images of androgyny and the post-mod beauty that the male front singers of such bands constructed, were the complete opposite of the essence of bands like the Sex Pistols, The Clash and even the American band the Dead Kennedys. However, the appropriation of disco and punk into this new genre revealed a clear 'identification' (Butler 1993: 209, original emphasis), as the loss of gender was countered/complemented by a new sound and a new image. This newness was abject: the sound was not disco but it was not rock either, and the musical artists resisted steadfast images of the masculine, thereby presenting numerous aesthetic options for the young men of the time.

The straight/gay blur that the new wave embodied stemmed directly from its origins. As Theo Cateforis explains, the New Romanticism

had grown out of a gay Soho nightclub named Billy's, where promoter Steve Strange and DJ Rusty Egan organized a 'Bowie Night' that attracted numerous fans dressed up in tribute to the various phases of the singer's career. By the time that Strange and Egan moved to the Blitz club, the patrons were dressing in increasingly imaginative and original costumes that cut across a seemingly inexhaustible range of historical periods, ethnic influences and gender boundaries.

(2011: 47)

New Romanticism, and therefore reading Duran Duran ideologically, reflects a time in the United Kingdom when messages from aesthetics, semiotics and sound produced significations that questioned gender representation. A distortion of the norm took place, visually and via sound, and the leisure space that punk incorporated was shifted. Cateforis further suggests that

where the new wave movement had drawn much of its inspiration from the 1960s mod youth culture, the New Romantics, or the 'new New Wave', as Bowie offhandedly referred to them, ransacked a realm of more distant styles that had lain virtually untouched in the late 1970s.

(2011: 48)

This new subject blurred fashion, gender and style, creating a new leisure space for teens and young adults, be it in the listening of music and the assemblage of personal style or the more adult phenomenon of style in relation to club-going.

Teens, in the years when both disco and punk died, had something other than rock to listen to. In the offerings of Duran Duran and the band's contemporaries teens of the era found what was needed: a new music, a classy yet highly progressive look, and an aesthetic that let boys be a new kind of boy. Youth culture began to sport tailored fashions, pastel colours, eyeliner, bleached bangs and busy hair. The boys who embraced this kind of look were not randomly labelled 'queer' in the process. These kids were New Romantics, sexually defiant (as the genre itself thwarted contemporary gender norms), and by 1982 the term 'Duranie' was coined for young people who copied the aesthetics of Duran Duran.

Timing was everything. As London youths craved a new sound, John Taylor wanted to merge disco with punk and somehow brought together opposites--from genre to gender, from sound to style. He met with Nick Rhodes and the principal axis of Duran Duran was formed, nameless and incomplete. But the soon-to-be Duran Duran furthered what the UK New Romantics had just started: the band's ultimate members would be involved with creating a new image for young men to think about, continuing a visual discourse that meshed androgyny, gender and a response to maleness. The resulting discourse that emanated from their music and images also flowed into realms of the feminine, where artists such as Annie Lennox provided an alternative vision of femininity to those who could not, or would not, fit the conventional Hollywood model (Porteous 2011). Although this particular project is focused on masculinities, it is integral to this study to at least utter that this gender insubordination was not limited solely to the realm of male agency.

The late 1970s for Duran Duran, much as it was for the young people of London, was in constant movement and related indeterminacy. Forming the band proved challenging, with singers coming and going and the inability to achieve the right look. Cover boy John Taylor was first seen by Simon Le Bon when he came to audition for the role of lead singer. At the time, Taylor was still calling himself Nigel, his legal first name (rather than the middle name he assumed when the band was formed), and he was hidden behind glasses. As Le Bon recalls about his initial vision of Taylor,

The first time I saw John, he was this speccy geek [...] trembling with fear at the prospect of having to meet people'; [...] as well, [Le Bon] felt that Taylor 'was rather beautiful, exquisite in fact', as he believed that Taylor 'was the best-looking guy I'd seen in years, maybe my whole life.

(Malins 2005: 39)

It is this look that remains the primary focus here--the look Le Bon could see, the look initiated by Spandau Ballet but truly popularized by Duran Duran. There are striking similarities in the first photo shoots of Spandau Ballet and Duran Duran (e.g. the earliest are in black and white and the clothing remarkably similar); there are even more striking similarities in each band's first music videos. It also appears that both bands copied one another: the panelling in Spandau Ballet's music video for the song 'True' (1983), for example, is very similar to that in Duran Duran's music video for 'Save a prayer' (1982), and the setting and mystery-type story in Spandau Ballet's music video for the song 'Gold' (1983) are quite comparable to those found in Duran Duran's music video for 'Union of the Snake' (1983), although who came up with which idea first is difficult to determine.

Ironically, although Duran Duran emerged after Spandau Ballet, Spandau Ballet would never achieve the megastardom that Duran Duran did and soon disappeared, whereas Duran Duran's fame was unsurpassed during the band's heyday.

Curiously, and a bit of a side note perhaps, Duran Duran's devotion to and association with New Romanticism extended into their post-first-album commercialism. The last track of the poppy, snappy and exceptionally popular Rio album is 'The chauffeur'. This track echoes earlier Spandau Ballet as well as the king of glam-synth, Gary Numan. 'The chauffeur' was originally a poem that Le Bon wrote in 1978; set to music for the Rio album, it carries the ghostly synth sound of the original New Romanticism that accompanied parts of the band's first album and its earlier sound. It is very New Romantic--arguably the most New Romantic song by Duran Duran--sounding nothing like the other Rio tracks. By this time, the band members had lost their New Romantic appearance, more or less, and they were becoming progressively mainstream. The lyrics are rather 'post-Coleridge-ian', with repeated references to nature as an emotional entity, as well as Byronic in their voyeuristic sensuality. The outro, 'sing blue silver', would go on to become the name of the band's hugely successful, post-third-album tour of 1984. The band's masculinity/modernity challenged, via New Romanticism and the Rio album itself, 'the placing of the masculine within discourse and the symbolic, and the feminine as a "stain", "outside the circuit of discourse"' (Butler 1993: 196, citing Zizek 1989: 75). In Butler's terms, the 'abjection of the feminine' (1993: 196) was mitigated via this new male discourse, a consistent gesture that recaptured the band's New Romantic roots, as the members of Duran Duran and their male contemporaries created a 'differential' (Butler 1993: 197) aesthetic. This semiotic sign, this incredibly dynamic image of a 'new masculine', became a new genre that challenged established music trends and images of masculinity.

RE/DE-READING GENDER: THE EARLY 1980s

I had formed the same opinion about John Taylor as Simon Le Bon, although I was seven years his junior. I was 15 the first time I saw John Taylor, in the photos included with the Rio LP. He was different, taller and lankier than American heart-throbs, but by no means effete or girly. With his hair stained burgundy or chunk-highlighted throughout his bangs, he caught my attention; he was, to me back then, fashion-forward and so very cool, like a British Matt Dillon. He did not cause me to question my then closeted sexuality and, instead, allowed me to find a style and look I could copy. John Taylor's new masculine vision spoke in a voice not yet heard before, a voice teen culture might not really hear again. He was like a posh, young James Bond--boyish and dreamy. I wanted to be him more than anything in the world. Had puberty really kicked in at that point, I presume I would have wanted to be with him as well. I must have, on some level, read the visual in a way that allowed me, like countless teens in the United Kingdom and North America, to perceive John's image as difference, as unmitigated otherness. His image allowed me to queer my own identity without being out--yet.

If the major genres of music circa 1978 were not satisfying to the youth of an ending decade, as punk, old-school rock and disco were dying, then indeed those involved with the creation of music would be very clear about the need for the cultural production of an art that could release something pleasurable, such as new wave. For the UK trendsetters of the late 1970s, this creation released a sea of signifiers, visual, lyrical and aesthetic in many, many ways. The mode of interpretation of such signs--from sound to photograph to a live show to the music video--was the construction of a

discourse, and New Romanticism created a rather astute discourse of difference. Music-as-music video/image, of which the members of Duran Duran were at the forefront, articulated a postmodern masculinity as well as an autoerotic sexuality seen at this time in Duran Duran's and Madonna's music videos and photo shoots most notably, cultural production that crystallized the music business of the early 1980s. M. King Adkins even suggests ways to read Madonna's early music as new wave (2015:104); however, although the motifs in appearance of the artist might in some ways mirror new wave fashions of the time, Madonna is not new wave. New wave was accompanied by an 'artificial melange of synthesizers, rudimentary musicianship, androgynous fashion and feminized dance music' (Cateforis 2011: 59). Madonna is at best progressive on her first album, and, though she may articulate a version of an American new wave style, she falls into the category of pop/hit parade, as her subsequent career reveals. The once steadfast guitar of rock music was replaced by the synthesizer the hypermasculine male rocker became a new wave dandy of sorts, and new wave bands out of the United Kingdom released music and images that countered traditional notions of the masculine subject in the music world. The 'artificial', to use Theo Cateforis' term, was simply part of the 1980s (especially the early 1980s), but not all artists or bands that adopted a synth sound were instantly new wave.

By 1979, newer images of masculinity began to disembowel 'stable and predictable' language of the visual masculine subject and anchor 'particular signifiers to particular signifieds in order to form linguistic signs' (Silverman 1984: 195), new signs of the male subject. These signs manifested in music and youth culture, setting apart the New Romantics from those before and those after, as well as from other (sub) cultural groupings of this period. The result of this new aesthetic, part of this new chain of signifiers, was the reconstruction of both sound and gender. Two psychic processes were at play when considering this era and genre: the primary signifier is the sound of the music itself (not disco, nor rock nor punk, but something other than the established genres of music for the time), and the secondary signifier is the band in question--in this case, Duran Duran and the new masculinity of its members. Duran Duran created a 'discourse of the Other' (Silverman 1984: 194) that challenged masculinity. The result during this time was a new 'symbolic order which transcends the subject, and which orchestrates its entire history' (Silverman 1984:194). The male subject articulated by Duran Duran presented a gay/straight male, a new dandy who broke gender stereotypes and essentialist notions of masculinity.

Part of the success of Duran Duran was its members' ability to rethink/re-identify traditional notions of the masculine--they changed the history of masculine representation, if only for a little while, as their progressive, unconventional looks and styles went from subculture to the mainstream during the period 1981 to 1984, a rather short period of time. Their combination of looks and version of masculinity merged the seeming opposites of David Bowie and James Bond, which contributed both to the band's phenomenal success as well as to its subsequent demise. In addition, the band's success and its important contributions to masculine desire became further complicated by the seriousness of AIDS. By the time the AIDS crisis was labelled and stigmatized gay life, emaciated, made-up, constructed visions of the male subject were no longer acceptable. The fresh breath of freedom and play that New Romanticism and Duran-ism orchestrated became outdated, taboo and, in a pejorative sense, semiotically far too queer. By 1985, as Theo Cateforis points out, 'genre boundaries mirrored an undeniable social reality routinely reinforced in heavy metal-oriented magazines like *Hit Parader*, where musicians commonly dismissed new [wave] music groups as

"faggots" (2011: 59). This is part of the reality that plagued new wave bands, whether their members were straight or gay, as the aesthetic they adopted was under a rather strict heterosexist scrutiny, especially in the United States by the mid-1980s. Nonetheless, for a brief time, between the late 1970s and the early to almost mid-1980s, the new wave male artist presented a clear-cut image of modern masculinity. The 'fag discourse', as C. J. Pascoe argues, became part of the deep-seated homophobia that accompanies anything that is not traditionally masculine (Pascoe 2005: 330). This article has quoted words rooted in the word 'fag' twice thus far, and now a third time referencing Pascoe, which is regarded as the ultimate insult within heteronormative male spaces (Pascoe 2005: 342). Duran Duran simply became too 'faggy', and, by the outbreak of AIDS, the kind of male image the band articulated was simply not acceptable anymore.

CULTURAL REALITIES/PRACTICES AND THE NEW SOUNDS AND IMAGES OF THE EARLY 1980s

Unlike the punk aesthetic--ripped jeans, safety pins, sleeveless shirts, spiky hair--New Romanticism posited a less political form of individuality. The agenda was not about countering or speaking out against contemporary British politics but rather about creating a sound and style, believing in it and, for Duran Duran, becoming famous. The genre as a larger whole (not just New Romanticism but early 1980s new wave more generally) offered what teens craved: bands that 'showed a positive outlook for people who were seeking things to feel good about. The groups perceived a gap for teen heroes in England, America and Japan' (Goldstein 1984: 39). The post-punk liberated musicians and fans from the anger, dismay and rigidity that punk embodied. Both musically and aesthetically, movement was key to the New Romantics, as sounds, images and gender (roughly from 1979 to 1983) remained in constant motion, creation and flux.

In many ways, glam rock did not address content but rather sound, and part of its focus was questioned by punk, which was propelled by a political consciousness as well as a post-rock sound. Furthermore, glam rock embodied a vision that was, at least in part, linked to punk's aesthetic; in contrast, the New Romantics took what punk was not doing, the very essence of music itself, and combined a more orchestrated sound with a new aesthetic. Words, sounds, gestures and images revealed the romantic spirit of this post-punk genre, as each utterance gestured towards understanding the human heart and its journey. New Romanticism poured a soul into what could become new wave, a catchy melancholy that could and would merge disco and rock to create a very distinct style. Clearly, although punk did halt or at least 'interrupt the long-standing equation of sex and pleasure', within a couple of years of the advent of punk, teens wanted that equation reinstated (Frith 2001: 265). Simon Frith further suggests that the 'British punk subculture itself hardly differed, in sexual terms, from any other working-class street movement' (2001: 265), arguing that a sexist equation, one seemingly evident in so much of music culture, permeated the genre. The resulting double standard, which distributed more power to men involved with the music, placed the women of the punk movement in subordinate positions, either literally or in the way that punk was (save some of its female voices) patriarchally controlled.

New Romanticism started to change that reality, as the young men encountered in the bands of this genre meshed gender into a strange, artistic expressionistic gender bending and as women artists (e.g. Annie Lennox, Alison Moyet and the American Cyndi Lauper) emerged on the scene in larger numbers. Tony Hadley of Spandau Ballet and Phil Oakey of The Human League, much like Duran

Duran's Nick Rhodes, sported lipstick and rather visible make-up. In addition to guy-liner and some makeup, the various members of Duran Duran, like those of Japan and A Flock of Seagulls, had very busy, very coloured hair, clearly cued from David Bowie's Ziggy Stardust and Aladdin Sane. By the late 1970s, the double standard was certainly prevalent in the rock world; however, in the disco world, so many of the artists were women and seemingly queer men. With new wave the mix continued, still male dominated although the kind of male was visually so very different and created a much-needed response to hypermasculine images in popular music of the era.

The artist-fan paradigm is familiar in the study of music and popular culture, as the super teen-popular artists are frequently male and their audiences frequently composed of screaming teen girls. Yet with New Romanticism, the visual countered, at least in some ways, the double-standard equation identified by Frith in his discussion of rock music (2001: 265). At the height of the band's commercial success, Duran Duran did indeed have a wide audience of teen girls, but in the early days 'alternative' boys and young men were also a significant part of the group's listening audience. The members of Duran Duran, especially when compared to their punk contemporaries, were rather pretty, from hair to make-up, in a way that male music artists coming before them were not. Moreover, when this second British Invasion hit America, the fans were active in their appropriation of both music and gender. New Romanticism reached the trendy young people of the United Kingdom, from the streets to various levels of secondary schools, as well as college kids in the United Kingdom and North America, both young men and women, gay and straight. As a result, in many ways New Romanticism was responsible for the beginnings of the look that is associated with the early 1980s, as the United Kingdom provided artists and a new music that promoted a new way to wear gender, one that would come to an end in approximately 1985.

MAINSTREAM RESPONSES AND TEEN APPROPRIATION

Much of the first wave of the second British Invasion was rather underground and included various kinds of music, from New Romanticism to new wave and dark wave. The sort of gender bending exhibited by members of the respective bands was not always welcome in heteronormative middle-class homes. Think of the aesthetics of masculinity that were prevalent during the height of disco-- i.e. John Travolta, Tom Selleck--and then compare them with the pretty-boy images of the New Romantics. As straight boys, the members of Duran Duran revealed a creative impulse as they thwarted gendered delineations of style, and they queered their own aesthetics without queering their desires. Duran Duran presented a post-queer image of masculinity well before the word 'queer' had even been theoretically solidified. Moreover, a good deal of what was happening in the post-punk music subcultures of the early 1980s revolved around necessary change and resistance, movement away from family norms and the development of urban life that flourished in all kinds of cities during the time. Duran Duran's approach to masculinity embodied this type of desire, this agenda and related agency.

By the late 1970s, many UK bands had adopted new sounds and new looks, and the members of Duran Duran were an integral part of this movement. As they were in their late teens at the point, the suggestion here is that the creative process is both historical and biological. Teen culture, as one that posits itself away from the familiar, away from the home, is driven by what can be called desire. John Taylor's and Nick Rhodes' shared desire to do something great, despite the fact that they had no money, no look per se and not even a fully formed band, was part of their dream to get across the

Atlantic to New York City and make it in America--a form of desire in its purest sense. They sprang from a time and place that was paving new ground in music. Focused on success, by the time the band found its last missing piece in the form of lead singer Simon Le Bon, their future was bright. Success was part of their vision, a foundational component of the band's collective desire. This is the postmodernism of New Romanticism, part of the success of 'the Durans'. In combination with time and place, the members of Duran Duran magnified the deep-seated desire that was inherent among the young people involved with this subculture. Taylor's and Rhodes' knowledge of music and their contemporaries, their own musical history and the world of the time allowed them to not only question but also become directly involved with the conflict of music genres of the time.

THE CLIMAX AND DECLINE OF NEW ROMANTICISM: THE RETURN OF GENDER RIGIDITY

The climax and rapid demise of this singular moment are due, at least in part, to the homophobic associations that accompanied the outbreak of the AIDS pandemic. Along with rather fluid images of masculinity, colour patterns of the first half of the 1980s (pastels) and 1940s style post-gangster cuts were replaced by a post-1950s look, in a 1980s sense. Vanilla Ice and his far more conventional vision of masculinity became the new 'in'. At this particular historical moment, I felt myself go through a turmoil of self-representation, attempting to fit the style norms of the second half of the 1980s that were so very different from those of the first half. Occasionally I would break out the faded tapered jeans of old with my black Converse All Stars. I felt shunned yet in some way vindicated. By 1988, the idols of my teen years had disappeared and their associated gender bending--the new visions of masculinity foregrounded by the members of Duran Duran and their contemporaries--was no longer visible. I cut my mullet into a Vanilla-Ice 1950s' retro-pomp and tried to 'butch up'. These years were exceptionally unsatisfying.

A good point springs from M. King Adkins' understanding of the 'reshuffled' images that new wave embodies, 'a pure celebration of the sign alone' (2015: 115): the sign as a signal unit rarely can survive, and by 1983 new wave was becoming far more mainstream. The signifiers set up by the images portrayed by the artists themselves had been appropriated and understood by youth culture. What was once edgy, new, rebellious even, became 'last year' and, thus, in part mainstream. By 1985, the new wave artist (and the once New Romantic) became involved with Band Aid. A contradiction took place and the superficial jetsetter was coupled with a lack of believability. It became difficult to be convinced that the coked-up, super rich and materialist musical sensation would be ready to really help world hunger. Bob Geldof (The Boomtown Rats), Midge Ure (Ultravox) and Bono (U2) were believable, but the rest of the performers on the song 'Do they know it's Christmas?' (1984), by and large, were not. This added yet another strike against the commercialism of the bands in question, especially Duran Duran, whose following by once devoted fans had shifted dramatically, resulting in the band's demise by approximately the end of 1984. Amid the backdrop of the severely homophobic realities that accompanied the outbreak of the AIDS pandemic, new wave was on its way 'out'.

Homophobia is a tricky term. Many associate it with simply the mainstream but indeed it also has roots within gay subculture as a whole, regardless of its modernity or postmodernity. AIDS created a very drastic response to once great bands like the Village People and the gender-bender disco sensation Sylvester. During the disco years, images of African Americans and gay men were seen

more visibly, if not treated with greater integrity, in cultural production. By the early 1980s, however, AIDS was (incorrectly) culturally perceived as being exclusively gay-related, and it soon became linked to the black community with rumours of the pandemic's chain being started in Africa and continuing in the United States within drug-laden, poor communities labelled as black. Lots of problems exist here, as the racism and homophobia that accompanied initial 'understandings' of AIDS were not so pretty. For young gays making peace with their own visions/versions of identity (or at least trying to), the aesthetics set up by the members of Duran Duran became antiquated, no longer viable and visibly effeminate, despite their playboy-like personas. As effeminacy was equated with passive sexual activity and illness, the very lean, highly stylized forms of the band members of Duran Duran and other new wave artists were overthrown by the more athletic males of the new homoerotic American imagery, such as the models being featured in Calvin Klein's famous underwear ads. Oddly, what might have been attractive to women or teen girls was not to gay men, and the images of the new man from the early 1980s became taboo by the end of that same decade. The aesthetics of new wave, even a commercialized version of it, were lost, along with long hair, guy-liner and androgynous looks. New wave became dark wave and thus very, very underground, and what was once so hopeful became lost in the fear and arguably the sadness of the early years of AIDS.

The 'queer monster', like the unfortunate gay man with AIDS, began to be shunned, feared and ostracized. In the wake of the AIDS pandemic, Duran Duran's new maleness of sorts became monstrous, as did guy-liner, mullets, scarves and other forms of dress or aesthetics that were not traditionally masculine. Hypermasculine visions burst forward in popular culture: Mark Wahlberg's buff bod was the bestseller for Calvin Klein underwear; Vanilla Ice was so hunky he could date the then queen of pop, Madonna. Judith Halberstam argues, in reference to what she calls 'Gothic monstrosity', that 'the relation between fear and desire may be oedipalized, psychologized, humanized' (1995: 9). In this regard, the once sought after new man became feared, not masculine enough. The once new man became 'the desired/feared object' as he revealed the transformation from sought after object to monster, and systemic 'paranoia' accompanied the once hip, new wave man (Halberstam 1995: 9). The men of Duran Duran, like many queer men of the time, became monstrous because they were not traditionally masculine; effeminacy of any kind was just not in vogue, and a paranoia about masculinity seems to have permeated the kinds of images present in popular culture of the late 1980s. To Halberstam, 'The monster is the product of and the symbol for the transformation of identity into sexual identity through the mechanism of failed repression' (1995: 9). Boy George, Limahl, the male members of The Human League became lost in fear of the late 1980s, a far cry from the liberation, the movement the flux of New Romanticism of the early years of that same decade. The collective psychologized understanding of effeminacy as monstrous rang true as a strong conservatism, both politically and culturally, and overthrew the decadence that characterized the late 1970s, along with the multifaceted aesthetics that characterized the early 1980s. What was monstrous was directly associated with a new fatal disease of which no one had adequate knowledge or control. The image of the young man in popular culture thereby changed and, by 1987, he was no longer androgynous, nor gender rebellious.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS: 'LAST CHANCE ON THE STAIRWAY'

The members of Duran Duran and the images associated with new wave became scapegoats of paranoia. New Romanticism was too soft, too fay, too gay and thus directly associated with AIDS,

the diseased body and even death. Modern medicine, thankfully, now has a hold on the monster called AIDS, the people directly affected by it no longer monstrous, just people, living and sometimes struggling with HIV. Where the decline of New Romanticism is troublesome fear has been at least historically arrested in some ways. The intermeshing of desire, masculinity and health has been disembowelled, and the era itself, much like the first few years of Duran Duran's popularity, offers manifestations of nostalgia, pastiche and even retro-chic. Out of the often forgotten bands of a time lost in history, Duran Duran still sells out shows, and the band's most recent album, *Vaper Gods* (2015), received rather strong reviews.

In 1983, I used to sneak out of the house to put on my guy-liner. When I bleached out strips in the front of my hair for my senior prom in May 1984, my mother had me dye them back the same day, making me feel badly about what she presumed would be my father's reaction. The forbidden, to youth culture, is part of the allure. The taboo of teenhood is its fuel--tell a teen 'no' and they will say 'yes'. During my high school years, alternative ways of embracing and articulating masculinity were exceptionally popular, right up until (roughly) 1986. But by the mid- to late 1980s, something happened to masculine desire and personal representations. As a reaction to the homophobia that accompanied the AIDS pandemic, New Romanticism and new wave died. In addition, commercialism, in-house fighting and drugs caused Duranie-ism to die as the bad broke up, and then got back together only in part (Taylor 2012). By 1986 at the latest, the body as a readable text that enunciated otherness became the new taboo. The post-Bond pretty boys of Duran Duran were 'out' and masculinity was restructured back into its more traditional forms, revealed within the American mainstream of the time, in advertising and other media. The unconventional male body became dangerous, a threat, a large 'other' feared via associations of disease and homophobia. Everything changed. The year 1987 was a far cry from 1983.

Youth culture shifts, changes and morphs. Music sometimes does the same. But what Duran Duran did, what the world witnessed with the second British Invasion, had not been done before, and it has not been done since. Visions of the masculine were not directly questioned but rather built up; a new man came forward, one I still like to see, one I do miss. Otherness is sometimes not monstrous. The ideological stigma that associates progressive visions of masculinity and desire with effeminacy and danger is, I hope, halted, or has at least been thwarted by history, medicine and education.

So you might wonder: John Taylor is still gorgeous in his 50s.

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liked the same music but always came along for the fun. And yes, I wish I could be 17,18 and 19 again, so young and so enthused to listen to the music from the United Kingdom by my favourite new wave and alternative rock bands.

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